Preface

Europe was shocked by the news: a boat full of migrants sinks in the Mediterranean Sea, carrying fifty-seven people to their deaths. The episode occurred when the Italian Navy vessel *Sibilla*, responsible for protecting the common EU borders, collided with the migrants' boat in the course of its duties. There was serious debate as to whether this was an accident or part of a political effort to stop the flow of migrants—and whether the Italian Navy could have done more to save the victims. The year was 1997 and the migrants were Albanians.

This incident is known as the Otranto tragedy. In a historical irony, “*Sibilla*” refers to the female prophets of the ancient Greek world, who were believed to be capable of foreseeing the future. Almost twenty years later, sinking boats and drowned migrants are common in the Mediterranean. In the past, the “Others” who did not deserve to enter Europe were of different origins than those of today, but the mobility and border regimes we see in 2015–16 were already being rehearsed and shaped in the early 1990s.

This is a book about a cross-border motorway that passes through such an EU/non-EU border, dividing Albania from Greece. In examining this road, we will see not only the flow of people, labor, and things—including cities and houses—but also a road flowing materially in itself. Most importantly, via this road we will see the material and sociopolitical construction that flowed through the whole of Europe after the cold war.

The idea that infrastructures constitute an important element of the anthropological project first appeared many decades ago (see Godelier 1978; Harris 1968). In more recent times, infrastructures have reemerged as a central theme within the discipline (Dalakoglou 2009a; Dalakoglou and Harvey 2012; Harvey and Knox 2015; Humphrey 2005; Larkin 2008, 2013). Roads are one of the best infrastructures through which to study anthropologically. They are the archetypal human-made network; they are physically static, but at the same time they are the

infrastructure of mobility per se. Today, when we are surrounded by so many networks—visible or invisible, tangible or intangible—the archetypal properties of these roads—their sense of *roadness*—extend beyond the named category. However, this is not to imply that everything is a road; roads are qualitatively and ontologically unique. This uniqueness refers to the fact that roads, socioculturally, are the most anthropocentric and established of human-made networks.

Ethnographically, the highway examined in this book is part of an explicit cultural–material nexus that includes elements such as houses, urban architecture, building materials, and vehicles. Yet even the most physically rooted of these entities are not static ethnographically, but have fluid and flowing physical materialities, and contain superstructural, infrastructural, or even—as Victor Turner (1995) would put it—antistructural characteristics. Such an infrastructural ethnography provides an approach that allows the anthropological gaze to fall anew on some of the most typical scales of social analysis (e.g. between historical and ethnographic perspectives or between social agent and structure, material and human, static and mobile). Within such a context, complex sociopolitical phenomena such as EU border security, nationalist politics, transnational kinship, social-class divisions, post-cold war capitalism, political transition, and financial crises in Europe—and more precisely in Greece and Albania—can be seen as phenomena paved in and on this cross-border highway.

Moreover, the highway featured in this book helps us to explore anew classical anthropological categories of analysis in direct reference to the infrastructure. Categories such as the house, domestic life, the city, kinship, money, boundaries, nationalism, statecraft, geographic mobility, and distance—to name but a few—seem very different when seen from or on the road. As such, this book is not merely an ethnography *on* the road but an anthropology *of* the road.